

HOT COPY

By M. C. BLACKMAN

From Harpers

THERE never was another person, I guess, who hated newspapers and reporters like this author chap, Arthur M. Dodd. I wish I could get that guy off my mind.

If he saw me again, he would not know me from Adam's off ox, but he has been quite an influence in my life, and I may turn out to be a famous writer on account of him. He was the cause, in a way, of me becoming a newspaper reporter, and now he has started me practising to be an author.

I'd just as soon he never got any closer acquainted with me, because if he knew all there is to know, he might get real nasty.

It was last week I met him in a speakeasy. Not that I am a boozier, but every man has to have a little drink now and then to steady him up. When I went in Dodd was sitting humped down in a chair and, in spite of the way he looked, I remembered him from that time up state when I got to be a reporter.

I cannot express it how that man looked. It gave me a feeling, and I am used to things. His face was as white as this piece of paper, except for a ragged set of whiskers; and his clothes looked like nothing to make a tailor proud. But it was his eyes that got me. Fishy, they were, but more like two agate marbles in a pile of sand. He did not look up, but just sat there like a lump.

Feeling kind of creepy, I ordered a shot of whisky straight when I had meant to have only a highball. After I gulped it down I stood there thinking about how this Dodd had changed. Three years ago he was as fine a looking chap as they grow in this neck of the woods. Everybody was predicting what a wonderful future he had before him. He worked his

way through college, with some help from a widowed mother, and had got quite a rep as a writer. I never could go his stuff, it was so queer; but the critics called him one of the Younger Philosophers, whatever that stands for.

But you could see he was a wreck now. Booze got him, and they say he is a dope, too. He hardly ever writes any more and spends what coin he has for liquor and dope. He spends a lot of his time in Chicago, hanging around taxi stands. I know why, and I might tell him a thing or two, but it is not any of my business.

Mike, the bartender, started kidding me about a story we had in the *Star* that day, and I was giving him the low down, when Dodd sat up in his chair and glared at us.

"Newspapers!" he said, almost choking. "Buzzards!"

That was a queer thing to say, but he did not say anything else. He sank back in his chair, and I noticed he looked at the liquor I had in my glass, with his mouth working. I figured he was short of coin and needing a drink. I saw he did not know me.

"Drink up, brother," I told him. "What will you have?"

"Thanks," he said, and shuffled up to the bar, ordering a shot. He could hardly wait for the bartender to set it on the counter, he was so eager. But he never drank that shot.

"What you said about newspapers," I began. "Now I am a newspaperman myself——"

Say, I have had people to look at me without any love in their eyes before. A fellow with my job has to get used to it. But this Dodd looked at me as though I had suddenly broke out with a filthy disease. I never saw anything so unfriendly in my life. I could guess why, but he ought to know that some things are like that.

"Scum!" he said, and what does the nut do next but pour that glass of good whisky in the cuspidor.

Well, I never argue with gin heads when they have been drinking, and it is no use getting insulted at things they say. They ain't right.

"Oh, if that is the way you feel about it, all right with me," I said. "It will probably do you more good in the cuspidor anyway."

But the poor prune could not stand it without a drink any longer. He came back to the bar and parked by me.

"I say, my friend," he remarked. "I am not quite myself to-day. If you will just forget what I said and renew your offer of a drink I will be obliged."

So I bought him another drink, and we got to talking. He was willing to talk as long as I bought the drinks, and I kept Mike pretty busy awhile. I saw he was sore on newspapers, so I dropped that and started talking about being an author.

I asked him if he thought I could learn to write short stories, and he said sure, it would be easy for a man with intelligence like me. Of course, I knew he was soaping me for the drinks, but still I am no nitwit.

I asked him how to go about it, and he said it would be best to get a good book on short-story writing and learn what he called the "mechanics" of writing, and then just write about everyday things that happened around me. That crack about "mechanics" gave me pause, as they say, because it sounded like work, and I always thought people who wanted to be authors just sat down and dashed off a couple of hot yarns and sent them off.

Anyway, I set up once more for Dodd and left him there looking more than ever like a last year's bird nest. I decided I would take his advice and try the thing out. While I have not got anything to say against newspaper work, because it is high class, still, I figure a man with brains ought to get into the magazine game where the big money is.

First, I have got to get used to writing. I am a street man and I 'phone in all my stuff to the fellows on the desk, and they set it down, put in the commas and all the "alleges" so it will read smooth and still be safe. It is my story, of course, but working that way I do not get much practice at writing. I expect my grammar is not as pure as the editors like, but I can learn that easy.

I am writing this for practice and another reason. I expect that as soon as a man becomes a famous author the editors and the public are going to want to know something about him. So while I am practising I am going to set down a few facts about my life, and when my history is needed it will be all ready. What I say will be the truth, and what I leave out will be nobody's business.

The less said about my early life the better, but there are a few things I want to mention before somebody else does.

It is a cinch that denials in print are about as useless as arguments with traffic cops. They do no good. When I am on a story I always say, "Now listen here, friend; say what you've got to say *first*. Deny charges before they are made, or in the same edition, anyway." And it usually works.

So nobody is going to put it over on Henry Jasper Brown—that's me—by digging up some past history of mine and giving *their* version of it. I got nothing to be ashamed of, but I know my newspapers.

I was born in Leavenworth, Kansas. Most people think that is only a prison, but it is a town also, and people live there. When I was born my old man was inside the walls. Maw was living outside, waiting for Dad to get out. He never did. He died in there when I was twelve years old, and he had three years to go. It was just as well he kicked off, because he died with Maw thinking he was a fine man and believing he got a dirty deal. I'm wise, and I know she would have learned different if he had got out. It seems he was doing right well selling gold bricks to farmers and then he switched over to peddling dope. The federals got him. But what is the use of going into details about that? It was just one of those things, as they say.

Maw laid the leather on me and made me go to school until I got too big to handle, and I skipped out. Don't think I threw her down, because I did not. I believe every man ought to keep at least one of the Ten Commandments, and I picked out the one about honouring thy father and mother. I could not do much by the old man, but I always honoured Maw. I sent her money when I had it and letters when I didn't. Now she has got a snug little cottage in Leavenworth and plenty of time to tinker with the radio, which she is bugs about. I go to see her every year or two.

Skipping over the next few years after I left home, in which nothing criminal or interesting happened to me, we come to this city, which is what I did.

I arrived here about the same time as a high-powered newspaper editor from New York, but I did not know then how important that was. My only interest in newspapers was in the "Male Help Wanted" columns. But even I noticed the change that came over the smallest of the two afternoon papers.

I mean it was very noticeable. It seems that the *Star* was bought by a company that owns a string of papers all over the country, all of them snappy, readable sheets. And how that little *Star* began to twinkle. It blossomed forth with three-inch streamers in red ink on pink paper, and more pictures than a family album. That New York editor, Mr. Morton, sure knew his headlines. A few weeks later I heard about his orders to the staff.

"Boil it down," he said, "and make it snappy. Then throw it away and fill the hole with pictures. Any fool can look at pictures, and our readers are fools."

Fools or not, they bought the *Star*. The circulation jumped from a few thousand to six figures, and believe me, the opposition was sick! It still is, but it tries to be scornful now. But it is hard to laugh off a rival circulation of two-three hundred thousand. The *Telegram* is so old it creaks, and as dignified as your maiden aunt. The editor still thinks a newspaper should be read and not seen!

Mr. Morton hired almost as many camera men as he had reporters, which was plenty. The snappers were all smart fellows, most of them from New York, and they knew their photos. Mr. Morton fitted out two trucks like regular studios, so the snappers could print their pictures on the way back to the office, and the speed they showed was a marvel. Editions every couple of hours and all of them hot.

I got a job driving one of the studio trucks. It was easy because I had been a taxi driver once.

It was like getting paid for having fun. That was three years ago when I thought eighteen dollars a week was good money. I got interested in the newspaper business the first week, and it did not take me long to get the hang of it, which is more than I can say for some of the old *Star* reporters, who pretty soon found themselves looking for jobs. But as I may have mentioned before, I am no dumb Isaac, and I could see that a picture of the pretty girl who saw the robbery was more important than a snap of the homely clerk who was robbed. That is first-reader stuff. I learned a lot from the snappers, too.

The third week I worked, there was a queer story broke in Wego, a small burg in an up-state county. The correspondent sent in a small item about plumbers finding the skeletons of two human bodies buried under the basement of the cottage

of Mrs. Emmaline Dodd. That was all, just three-four lines.

Most editors would have passed that by, but not Mr. Morton. He had not been here but a couple of months, but he clicked right away on that name Dodd. He knew that anything connected with the Dodd family was good copy, on account of the son of the family, the son being this same young writer chap, Arthur M. Dodd, which I met last week in the speakeasy. Mr. Morton hopped right on the story, figuring two skeletons in the basement was almost as good as one in the closet.

I saw that item in the paper and was interested because I had heard of the little burg Wego once before. Buck Hodges, a taxi driver I knew in Chicago, had a little skirt on his string, and she said she was from Wego.

Her name was Sylvia Laverne, and she wanted to be an actress until Buck came along. She was a cute little trick, with a funny little dimple in her left cheek, but she was too young. I told Buck he ought to pick them a little older, and he finally got wise and chucked her.

Mr. Morton sent a reporter, a snapper, and me up there to Wego. He picked me to drive the truck because the snapper told him I was always a lot of help, and I guess I was. It is a good thing he sent me, as things turned out. The reporter was named Anthony Watkins, and he was one of those kind I call lily-handed. He was always dreaming, and he did not seem to know what everything was all about. The only reason they kept him, I guess, was that he was really fluent on the typewriter, and they sent him up to Wego because they figured there probably would be a whole lot to write about nothing much. But I did not care for him.

Dick Burch was the photo expert and he was a good egg. He and I went up in the truck, which was only a two-hour drive, and Watkins followed on the train. We got there first and had time to look around a bit before the train got in.

We did not need much time to see all there was in Wego, which is like a million other towns that tourists try to dodge when they think of stopping for the night. One street (which was just a rough spot in the highway), a few stores, a few more houses, a big barn that passed as a hotel, the railroad station—and that is the picture of Wego. A half mile away was the lake, and by it the Dodd cottage. We drove by it for a once-

over, and it almost made me homesick. It looked a lot like Maw's place, with vines and flowers and a garden.

There was nobody at home. Arthur Dodd had been abroad nearly three years studying and writing, and he had made enough money to send his mother to California. His sister had gone there already to try to break into the movies and had drowned there, it seemed, just six months before all this happened. Her mother had been with her in Los Angeles several months before she got drowned. The old man had been dead for years, so there was only Arthur and his mother left. Arthur was having the cottage fixed up before Mrs. Dodd came back.

We got back to the station just as the train came in, causing great excitement among the natives as usual. Watkins got off and so did a man from the *Telegram*. One man, mind you. But there was a third passenger for Wego, which added to the excitement, because it was the first time in ten years three people had got off there at one time. At least, that is what I heard a guy say.

But my eyes popped when I saw that third man. He was Arthur M. Dodd himself. I knew him because it was only a week before that the *Star* carried a four-column picture of him, announcing his engagement to a swell New York society girl, who he fell in love with abroad.

And there was this dumb Watkins had been on the same train with him two hours and never got wise. You could not expect anything better of a *Telegram* man, but a *Star* man ought to be awake. I grabbed Watkins and whispered the tip. He looked kind of funny and excited.

"Are you sure?" he asked me.

"Hell's bells!" I said. "Ask him questions, not me."

From the way this Watkins looked at Dodd you would have thought he was looking at a god. I had heard him say he thought Dodd was a wonderful writer, but I did not think he actually worshipped the man, even if he did make lots of jack with his writing. They hardly mentioned the skeletons, and I was disgusted. Instead, Dodd talked about his mother and how wonderful she had been to him. He also told how much he loved his sister, Mary Lou, and how shocked he had been when his mother cabled him about her being drowned. Mrs. Dodd would not let him come home, he said, because the body

had never been found, and there was no use. Dodd seemed to take to Watkins, though I could not see why.

Well, Dick got busy, anyway, and while the *Telegram* man was still arguing with the half-dead hotel clerk, Dick and I were on our way back to the city with pictures of Dodd, the cottage with X marking the entrance to the basement, and a general view of Wego.

We had a layout in the final edition with a line:

YOUNG WRITER VIEWS GHASTLY FIND

There was some art work and a drawing of Dodd staring at two skeletons. The sketch of him looked more like a traveling salesman with the heebie jeebies than anything else, but the skeletons were plenty lifelike, if you get what I mean.

The pictures were fine, but there was not much to the story. It told about Dodd's return, and about finding the skeletons, one adult and one baby. Dodd was quoted as saying the cottage had not been occupied for nearly a year and that neither he nor his mother had any idea how the things got under the basement.

It wasn't much, but it stirred up interest in the case, and hot news was scarce. When Dick and I got back to Wego next day we found one of the Chicago papers had sent up a man and a photographer, and it began to look as if things might turn out interesting, after all.

The probe of the skeleton case, as we say in the headlines, was being carried on by the county coroner and the prosecutor. So far they had learned that two bodies, one adult and one baby, had been found under the basement of the Dodd cottage by plumbers. Which was pretty good for them.

But being prodded by the reporters the coroner crashed through with the statement that one of the skeletons was of a woman and the other of a very young infant. He also opined that they could not have been there more than two years, and gave a long explanation about the nature of the soil and something or other causing the flesh to decay quick. Not very sweet copy, but Watkins dressed it up pretty well, and we beat the *Telegram* on story and pictures. I decided Watkins might be half human, after all.

I was a little disappointed over what the coroner said about

the woman and the baby being dead at least two years, because I had been wondering if there could be any connection between the large skeleton and Mary Lou Dodd. It was just one of those wild hunches. But the Doc seemed to know his bones. It began to look as though a country dame and her baby had been bumped off and buried under the Dodd cottage while they were away, though why the murderer should pick that spot with the lake and miles of woods close at hand was more than I could figure out. And every female in Wego was well accounted for.

I did not see where a new lead for the story next day was coming from. Watkins did not seem to care, but settled down in the hotel lobby with a pencil and some paper. Probably he was writing poetry or figuring his expense account, or doing some other imaginative work. Some people are funny.

But I am a man of action, and I went out to stir around. I spent a pretty busy afternoon pottering around the Dodd place and talking to people, and then Dick and I went back to the city.

Next day I sort of casually suggested to the prosecutor when nobody else was around that it might be a good idea to look around the place for a weapon or something that might have caused death. He said he had not thought of that.

We could not shake off the other reporters, so the whole gang of us went down to the Dodd house and searched all over it, Arthur Dodd helping and chatting with Watkins. Then we went outside and looked around but did not find any blunt instruments or anything else that looked dangerous.

Before we left I sort of accidentally kicked at a flower pot near the outside basement entrance. It broke and when the dirt fell apart there was a small bottle in it. It was empty, but it had a poison label on it.

Everybody got excited except Watkins, and he looked at the bottle two or three times and then just looked bored. The prosecutor made an official statement about the find, the snappers took pictures, and the reporters sent in some more real news. All except Watkins. Honestly, that bozo got my goat.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked him. "Ain't you going to 'phone about this?"

"No," he said.

"Are you crazy?" I snapped. "Why in blazes are you passing up the only news you got to-day?"

"Because," he said, "I didn't like the looks of a brand-new poison label on a two-year-old bottle, if it was that old. That stuff was planted."

Well, he had me there. I clean overlooked the new label feature when I fixed it up. Yes, I might as well admit it was my job. Why not? It did no harm. Nobody else noticed my bust, but this Watkins is like that. But he thought it was the Chicago man did it.

However, I was determined the *Star* was not going to miss out on it after all my trouble, so I sneaked away and did some telephoning on my own. We had the story all right, but Watkins saw a late edition and he thought it had been rewritten from the other papers. He did not like it, but he liked even less what he got an hour or so later. Mr. Morton telephoned him. I figured it would be too good to miss, so I slipped over to the clerk's desk and picked up the receiver of an extension 'phone.

"Why didn't you send in something on that poison bottle?" the boss asked.

Watkins explained he was sure it had been planted and gave his reasons.

"Now, listen to me, young man," Mr. Morton said. "You were sent up there to find news, not to kill it. And when the prosecutor makes a statement, it is news. Understand?"

Watkins came away from the telephone looking like he had smelled a bad tomato. I had to laugh.

Dodd told the coroner and the prosecutor next day that his mother was coming home, and he asked them if they could not finish with the case before she got in, because he was afraid it might upset her worse than she was. But the poison bottle kept the thing alive, and they were still looking for "clues" when Mrs. Dodd arrived in Wego from California.

I clipped all the stories about that case, and I will copy the piece Watkins wrote about Mrs. Dodd, because it just goes to show how wrong some reporters can be. Also because that story got me started to doing some investigation of my own. He wrote:

It is almost impossible to think of horrible things in connection with Mrs. Emmaline Dodd, who arrived here to-day after a year in California, for a reunion with her son, Arthur M. Dodd, well-known young writer,

whom she had not seen since he went abroad nearly three years ago.

Two things marred their otherwise complete happiness in the meeting. One was the official investigation into the finding of two human skeletons beneath the tiny, vine-covered cottage where Mrs. Dodd lived happily for so many years and reared her two children to manhood and womanhood after a bitter struggle with poverty while they were mere babies.

The other shadow was their grief over the death of the daughter and sister, Mary Lou Dodd, who was drowned in California six months ago. Mrs. Dodd's sorrow has weighed heavily upon her, judging from her appearance to-day. She is a frail little woman, with dark, appealing eyes and the look of one who has suffered much and borne it well.

One marvels that she ever survived the struggles that must have been hers when she was left alone with two young children after the death of her husband eighteen years ago. With no resources other than the tiny home and her own capable fingers, she sewed for the villagers, tended a garden, and managed somehow to make ends meet. It is no wonder that Arthur Dodd is passionately devoted to her.

She has always been completely wrapped up in her two children, for whom she worked so many years. The sudden death of her daughter shattered half of her world. It was doubly hard, at a time when she was beginning to find real happiness in the success of her son.

Mrs. Dodd was so overcome with grief that she has never been able to furnish many details of the tragedy. For some reason, the California papers made no mention of the drowning, which occurred at a little-known beach resort, and the story did not reach this section of the country until the cablegram was received in Paris by Arthur.

There is a story that Mary Lou Dodd ran away from home a few years ago, fired with schoolgirl ambitions to go on the stage. Her mother, with understanding sympathy, persuaded her to return. Then, when she became convinced that the girl would never be content in Wego, she consented to her going to California to stay with a friend and seek a trial in motion pictures. She had little success in the already overcrowded field of filmdom, but it is understood that she was happily employed in a library at the time of her death.

Mrs. Dodd was too shocked by the gruesome discovery under her home to discuss it with reporters, and her son asked that she be excused from an interview.

Most of that is a lot of hokey, but it shows how Watkins was plumb sold on the Dodd family. Besides, there were two items that interested me a whole lot, and gave me a powerful hunch. One was that thing about Mary Lou Dodd running away from home, and the other was the reminder that Mrs. Dodd had been away from home only one year. And the coroner had said those bodies had been buried at least two years? I hadn't thought of it before, and neither had anybody else, but it looked as if Mrs. Dodd was living right there in the cottage when that woman and baby were buried.

Dick and I went back to Wego the day Mrs. Dodd arrived, instead of staying all night in the city like we had been doing. It was Saturday night, and I decided to talk to some of the natives. I went into the barber shop and risked my life getting a shave. Business was dull, so I sat around awhile talking to the barber, and to pep him up I gave him a few pulls at a bottle of bootleg I happened to have with me.

With a few slugs of liquor under his belt, how that barber did talk. He wasted enough language on me to last him six Saturdays in a city shop. Finally, I got him to talking about Mary Lou Dodd, and it was not long before he crashed through with a remark that nearly knocked my eye out.

"What was that?" I asked him, sitting up straight.

The barber grinned at me like something evil and then blinked like an owl.

"I say I got my own ideas about Mary Lou going away to California to join the movies," he said. "I think it was something different. After she came back from Chicago, where she run away, her maw kept her pretty close at home. But I was down by the lake one day and I saw her. She looked like if she wasn't married, she ought to of been. Only I never heard tell of a husband. Pretty soon after that she went to California."

"How do you know she went to California?" I shot at him.

The barber looked puzzled.

"Why, everybody knew it," he said. "Ain't she been gone these two years? Didn't she drown down there?"

"I know, but did anybody see her leave town? I mean, on a train or in a car?"

"Why, no; I don't reckon as there was anybody as did see her leave. Mrs. Dodd just told the postmaster her daughter had gone to California, and he spread it around. Why, do you mean——?"

But I had left him quick. I beat it back to the hotel and found Watkins sitting there in the lobby, reading a book of short stories by this Arthur M. Dodd. I guess he never got such a surprise from a truck driver in his life before.

"Listen, Watkins, that woman's skeleton they found was Mary Lou Dodd," I said. "And the baby was hers," I added for good measure.

"Nonsense," he snapped, looking hard at me and sniffing. "Are you drunk?"

"Never was more sober or serious in my life," I came back at him. "And I'll bet a week's pay I got the right hunch."

"Why don't you read the papers?" he asked me. "Mary Lou Dodd was drowned in California."

"Who said so? The body was never found, and Mrs. Dodd put out the only dope the newspapers ever had."

"Besides, Mary Lou was never married, so the baby could not have been hers," was the next crack of this dumb reporter.

"Don't be silly. Pharaoh's daughter was never married, either, but she found little Moses in the bulrushes," I said. I used to go to Sunday school back in Leavenworth and got many a laugh out of it.

Then I told him the barber's story, and how nobody ever saw Mary Lou leave Wego, and when I got through pointing out this and that, Watkins was beginning to take notice. He also looked kind of sick, and I guess he was thinking about that plap he wrote about Mrs. Dodd.

"And it looks to me," I ended, "like Mary Lou and her baby were murdered, and I would not need two guesses to pick out the old lady as the guilty party. She probably thought she was doing it for her daughter's own good. Let's go get the prosecutor and the coroner and get busy while the opposition sleeps upstairs."

Watkins was still not as anxious as he might have been, but he came along. We dragged the officials out of bed, and they did not growl much. It took a lot of talking, with me doing the most of it, to convince them; but finally they saw the light. They were all for action.

"Now, lemme see," said the prosecutor, "they may be awake yet at the cottage. Let's go there and talk to Mrs. Dodd some."

"Come along, young man," the coroner said to me. "I don't remember seeing you around here before, but you seem to know a lot about this thing."

Arthur Dodd, still dressed, came to the door and asked us to come in. I noticed he looked worried. The prosecutor asked to see his mother.

"My mother is confined to her bed," said Dodd. "She has had a nervous breakdown. Can I be of service to you?"

"Well, I dunno," said the prosecutor, who was a soft-hearted gink for a man of his calling. "This is important,

mighty important. Could you come down to my office with me a little while?"

Dodd looked puzzled, but he came along. I thought they ought to have left somebody to guard the house, but I did not like to say so in front of Dodd. So we all went back to the prosecutor's temporary office over the drug store.

"Arthur," said the prosecutor in a kind voice, "we have got reason to believe that one of those skeletons found under your house was your sister, Mary Lou, and it looks pretty bad."

Dodd jumped out of his chair and turned pale as a ghost.

"That is absurd!" he shouted. "My sister was drowned only six months ago in California."

Well, the prosecutor talked on for about an hour and asked questions. And say, he was not so dumb as he looked, either. Dodd kept getting more and more nervous and worried, pacing back and forth and messing up his hair. Finally, the prosecutor said gentlelike that he guessed he would have to arrest Mrs. Dodd for murder.

"No! No!" Dodd begged. "Wait! I will tell you the whole story, just as my mother told it to me to-day. It would kill her if she were arrested and the story got out. But I will tell you, and I am sure you will do what is right."

Then he told his story, and oh, what a story! The part about Mary Lou was just about as I had figured it out. He told how his sister was high strung and impulsive and crazy to be an actress or a movie star.

"She ran away from home soon after I went abroad," Dodd said, still pacing. "She was little more than a kid and had never been away from home much, so she hadn't the least idea what to do when she got to Chicago. She assumed a fanciful name, but that was as near as she ever got to the stage.

"After a week she fell into the clutches of a man—a taxicab driver—who took advantage of her youth and innocence. He got her into trouble and then left her. She, poor kid, was terrified, so she came home to Mother and confessed everything. She never told all the details, but it was easy to piece together her story.

"My mother was nearly crazy with grief and shame," Dodd continued, looking kind of crazy himself. "She feared publicity and scandal, because she was afraid it would ruin

my career as well as Mary Lou's life. She made Mary Lou stay in the house, while she worried and prayed. There was no one to whom she could go for advice."

Dodd stopped a minute and looked in a queer way at the book Watkins had in his hand. It was the same book Watkins had been reading at the hotel, and Dodd looked as though he halfway expected it to say something. I do not think he ever actually saw any of us there except the prosecutor and maybe Watkins. I remember every word he said and how he said it, because I was more than interested. I got to thinking about Buck Hodges back in Chicago. I guess it is a good thing for him he turned bootlegger and went East.

"My mother kept putting off calling the doctor from day to day," Dodd went on. "Finally it was too late. Then she closed up the house and did what she could, herself, for Mary Lou. She knew nothing about such things, and Mary Lou and the baby both died. After that, my mother had only one thought, and that was to keep the thing a secret. All alone in that house with the bodies she dug a place in the basement and buried them. How she did it alone I do not know. She must have been a little demented."

Dodd shook like a leaf and covered his face with his hands. That last was the part I could not figure out by myself, but I saw he was telling the truth. There was nobody in the room doubted him. He went on with the story, but the rest was simple. Mrs. Dodd had lived alone in the cottage a year, after letting it out that Mary Lou had gone to California, not even writing her son what had happened. Then she went to join her daughter, so everybody thought, and six months later she sent word back that Mary Lou had drowned, which nobody doubted. Not even Arthur.

I began thinking what a whale of a story that was going to be, and I could picture already the eight-column strip of art across the front page, with a story that would be as long as the columns lasted. Mr. Morton believes in boiling stuff down, but he would throw out everything but the ads for a really good story. And this was one of the best.

It was not as sensational, maybe, as a good murder would have made it, but it was chock full of what the boss calls human interest.

I suddenly noticed that Watkins was talking.

"I am the only newspaper man present," he was saying, "and I promise I will forget what you have said. And of course I will not say anything about it to my rivals."

He shook hands with Dodd and looked like he was about to cry. But that crack of his floored me, and I could not make head or tails of it. I did not pay much attention to what followed, only I did hear the prosecutor say that of course he would drop the matter and just make a formal report about finding the bodies of two persons who came to their deaths from unknown causes. I had a sneaking suspicion that Watkins had meant what he said, if you can imagine it. I soon learned.

"I certainly do not intend to write anything about it," he replied to my question. "That family has suffered enough, and there are some things even a newspaper reporter will not do. If you have a shred of decency about you, you will never mention what you have heard from Dodd."

"Decency, my aunt," I retorted. "Who are you to be speaking such fine words? Ain't you about to throw down your paper on the biggest story it ever had? A fine newspaper man you turned out to be."

"Brown," he said, looking at me in that nasty way of his, "I am convinced you have no finer sensibilities whatever."

"Maybe I got no sensibilities," I said, "but I got sense, and that will buy more groceries."

"All right," he said, turning away. "Tell Morton I have resigned."

And a good thing, too, I thought. A guy like that has got no business in the newspaper game. He ought to join a sewing circle. I learned later he joined the *Telegram*, which is just as bad.

It was almost daylight by then, and I waited around the hotel, going over the story in my mind and eating breakfast. Then I put in a call for the *Star* about the time for Mr. Morton to come down.

"Mr. Morton," I said, "this is Brown. Driving your studio truck up here at Wego. I got a good story, which your reporter fell down on."

Then I told him all about it, brief, but not forgetting to mention that I had had a good deal to do with it. I could hear him sputtering at the other end of the line.

"Listen, Brown," he barked at me. "Tell just enough of that to a rewrite man for the first edition—— No! Wait! Do any of the other reporters up there even suspect any of this?"

"Not a suspicion," I told him.

"Come into the office as fast as that truck will bring you," he ordered. "Tell Watkins he is fired." So they were even.

Well, it was a fine story. We beat the whole world, and the front page was all art and my story. A rewrite man wrote it, but it was my yarn. It was hot copy, believe me, and darn good for a beginner like me. But the best was yet to come.

"Brown, do you know anything about writing?" Mr. Morton asked me.

"No, sir," I said, "but——"

"Brown," he said, "don't learn. I can see right now you are going to be my star reporter."

And Mr. Morton mostly knows what he is talking about.

Well, Mrs. Dodd died a few weeks later. She did not look very healthy when I saw her that time in Wego. Arthur Dodd had some kind of trouble with his girl and they called the match off. I guess he started hitting the booze, and drinking is bad for you if you do it regular. I never saw him again until last week in that speakeasy, and I don't care if I never see him again.